

GAMES

FAQ

Q Can I use my PC joypad to play games that don't support such controllers?

A Many games are best played with a joypad, and most modern action and sports titles support them. Sadly, older games, emulated software and online Flash games often don't work with them, and getting a joypad to work with mouse-controlled games such as first-person shooters can also be tricky.

Xpadder (www.xpadder.com) is a free utility that allows you to emulate mouse and keyboard controls on your joypad. It also works with any controller that Windows recognises, including steering wheels and joysticks.

Setting up a controller is very straightforward. The interface lets you assign controls using a simple drag-and-drop interface. It has loads of settings, so you can tweak the sensitivity and dead zones of your analogue sticks, add basic force feedback and define controls for specific games. If you get stuck, one of the well-written help pop-ups should be able to point you in the right direction.

Seth Barton

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ELECTRONIC ARTS Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

★★★★

£25 inc VAT

There's a nagging feeling that this adaptation of the latest Harry Potter movie is actually quite a good game – as third-person adventures licensed from films go, at least. The trouble is that it doesn't feel as if it was intended for the PC. Games publishers seem to be under the illusion that a PC mouse is exactly the same as a Nintendo Wii remote. It isn't. You don't move a mouse through three dimensions of thin air as you do a Wii remote: you move it across the desk.

So what, on the Wii, may be an ingenious control system that evokes Harry's own wand-waving is simply awkward on a PC. This situation isn't helped by a hideous camera that often has you running in the wrong direction whenever you turn a corner.

The nuts and bolts of the game are interesting, however. Players use spells to alter the environment as well as for the game's (understandably bloodless) combat. You'll move furniture to find secrets or cast a repair spell to complete a task. It's a reasonably clever implementation of the innocence of Harry Potter's world. Unfortunately, like so many other licensed games (see Transformers, opposite), most tasks involve finding your way to a location on the other side of the game map, where either a fight or a cutscene occurs. Some of the voice-acting in these, even from actual members of the film's cast, is absolutely diabolical.

Despite this, the initial exploring is quite fun. Hogwarts school is a big place, modelled closely on its cinematic counterpart. Potter fans will get plenty of kicks simply from poking about in much-loved



▲ All the gang's here. Though seemingly carved out of wood.

locations. After a while, though, everything feels unreasonably far apart, especially when the terrible camera means that getting there involves a lot of running into walls and accidentally going back the way you came.

Still, the game makes good enough use of its licence to entertain youthful fans regardless. All the visual requirements of Hogwarts are there, even if the graphics are distractingly crude and dated. The faces are recognisable (although, hilariously, Harry, Ron and Hermione have been shrunk to make them appear younger than the actors that play them), and that's probably enough for occasional gamers. There's a vast amount of stuff to collect, too, which unlocks video clips and power-ups. Those of an obsessive nature will be distracted for much longer than the surprisingly meaty storyline takes to complete.

Despite all its problems, this is easily the best Harry Potter game yet. The actual mechanics of exploration and combat may be wobbly enough to deter seasoned gamers, but as an interactive representation of Hogwarts, it's unparalleled.

Alec Meer

SUMMARY

- ✓ Best Harry Potter game yet
- ✗ Controls are awkward
- ✗ Too much walking back and forth

ACTION GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 5GB disk space
PART CODE B000Q5JOUQ
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS <http://harrypotter.ea.com/>

Top 5 games

1. Lord of the Rings: Shadows of Angmar

£18 + £9 a month inc VAT ★★★★★



This online role-playing game lets you immerse yourself in Tolkien's Middle Earth. The game's detail is truly stunning, it's easy to get into and the combat is excellent.

SUPPLIER www.play.com **DETAILS** www.lotro.com **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2007



2. Colin McRae: DiRT

£18 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game is a double-whammy of remarkable graphics and intense physics. Never before has a road surface felt so real. It's an amazing leap forward for driving games.

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.codemasters.com/dirt **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2007



3. Supreme Commander

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



This RTS has the biggest battles ever seen on a PC. There's a vast range of units to command and the graphics are slick, but you'll need a powerful PC to run it smoothly.

SUPPLIER www.play.com **DETAILS** www.supremecommander.com **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2007



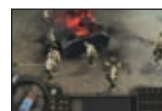
4. Company of Heroes

£14 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game looks fantastic, from the historically accurate units to the bombed-out French towns. But it's the innovative gameplay that makes it the best RTS around.

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.thq.com **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



5. FIFA 2007

£13 inc VAT ★★★★★



The fully licensed teams and slick presentation have always been welcome, but FIFA 2007 is easier to play than its predecessor. Arguably, the best football game around.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com **DETAILS** <http://fifa07.ea.com> **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007





▲ You can unlock classic versions of Optimus and Megatron, but doing so is long, hard work

ACTIVISION Transformers: The Game

★★

£18 inc VAT

A game about robots that turn into cars has to do just two things well: fighting robots and fast cars. Transformers: The Game manages neither, and you quickly get the feeling that it was rushed out in time for the film's release date.

As with so many games based on movies, Transformers is a third-person action game. However, the action is its greatest failure. Presumably struggling with how you create a sense of threat for a near-indestructible robot, the developers have made almost all its challenges time-based, such as the mission where Blackout has to smash buildings spread across the map before the clock stops.

Driving is even worse, and usually involves getting Optimus Prime to a green dot before the time runs out, then doing it again, and again. It's frustrating, too, as you can run out of time or fail a mission simply because your robot didn't stop exactly on the specified bit of road. This is nonsensical, and it's hugely frustrating when you have to repeat a dismal and over-precise mission over and over again.

In vehicle mode the robots feel weightless and unresponsive, so rushing to your destination on time lacks any of the thrill of racing. The fighting, when it happens, involves simply pressing one button repeatedly. Your robot has guns, but they're effective only against enemies so weak that they're harmless anyway. Everyone else has an infinite shield that renders weapons useless. Fortunately, there's such a lack of variety among the baddies that you'll muddle through anyway.

The only good aspect of the game is that you can play as the Autobots or Decepticons. Even so, the repetition, poor in-game camera and miserable challenges soon remove any element of fun. In theory a game involving transforming robots is packed with potential, but this one misses the point completely.

Alec Meer

SUMMARY

- ✓ Reasonably good looking
- ✗ Horrible time-based missions
- ✗ Mindless fighting and rubbish driving

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 64MB graphics card, 4.5GB disk space

PART CODE B000QDCDUQ

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS www.transformersgame.com



▲ The MRSA superbug is the least of your worries in Hospital Tycoon

CODEMASTERS Hospital Tycoon

★★

£15 inc VAT

Hospital Tycoon is a resource-management and problem-solving strategy game (like Sim City or Theme Park) set in the middle of a zany hospital soap opera. It tries hard to be funny, but the humour mostly misses the mark, and the game lacks any real depth.

The basic objective is to cure patients so that they give you money, which gives you the means to cure more patients and make more money. There are two modes of play. Story mode provides a friendly guided introduction to the game, with set objectives for each level, romantic cut-scenes and onscreen guidance from your assistant. Sandbox mode offers a more flexible environment in which you can set the amount of cash you start with and build your own hospital from scratch before tackling a range of outlandish illnesses.

As new patients are admitted, your dedicated staff must research their medical conditions and provide you with a list of the equipment they need to cure them. Your job is to buy this without going bankrupt. Fail to do so, and you'll find the grim reaper stalking the halls of your hospital.

Once you've bought the equipment and hired the staff, the hospital more or less takes care of itself until the next new disease comes along. Obviously, using real diseases would be tasteless, so instead you'll find yourself curing conditions such as Jibba Jabba and Leaping Cough. These present symptoms that usually include a range of 'wacky' (not to mention annoying) sound effects and, as this is a family-friendly title, no gore.

You can track the progress of individual patients and micro-manage your staff's interpersonal relationships. However, you can't direct their work, which can be frustrating.

Despite its setting, Hospital Tycoon offers nothing new. It quickly becomes repetitive, and the hospital soap theme doesn't add any actual interest or involvement.

Kat Orphanides

SUMMARY

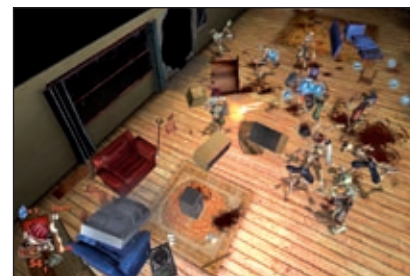
- ✓ Two modes of play extend longevity
- ✗ Repetitive gameplay
- ✗ Annoying sound effects

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM DirectX 9.0c, 750MB disk space

PRODUCT CODE B000O32TK2

SUPPLIER www.game.co.uk

DETAILS www.codemasters.co.uk



▲ Zach the high school zombie killer had the biggest living room in town

SOUTHPEAK Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia

★

£20 inc VAT

Monster Madness is an arcade-style action game with inoffensive cartoon-like visuals. Your job is to protect suburbia from the zombie and monster hordes by taking on the role of high school characters Zack, Carrie, Andy and Jennifer. Our four heroes can swing, throw and fire a wide variety of weapons, from axes to rocket launchers.

Unfortunately, this doesn't add up to an enjoyable game. The inexplicable invasion of suburbia is confusing, the character design is boring and stereotyped and the physics are less than impressive. The difficulty level also see-saws in an unsatisfying manner, and the graphics do little to impress.

If Monster Madness were simply a good old-fashioned arcade-style game that required the player to hit buttons ever faster, it might still be fun, but the standard keyboard controls are unnecessarily complicated. The constant need to look down at the keys to work out how to move while being bitten to death is far from enjoyable. A joypad makes this less of a problem, but the controls are still confusing at times.

This is probably due to the fact that Monster Madness was developed simultaneously for the Xbox 360. On several occasions the game asks you to press the 'A' button to continue. Unfortunately, it's not referring to the A key, but rather the A button on the Xbox 360 controller. The game actually wants you to hit the Enter button, but the developers have made no effort to change this detail on the in-game menus.

This is a shame because Monster Madness could have been a silly and amusing bit of fun, but the game's lack of polish prevents you actually enjoying it. The original concept may have seemed amusing, but playing the game simply isn't.

Kevin Pocock

SUMMARY

- ✓ Simple arcade-style gameplay
- ✗ Confusing and frustrating controls
- ✗ Unimpressive graphics

ARCADE SHOOTER Requires Windows XP or Vista, 1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 128MB graphics card, 800MB disk space

PART CODE B000JJFS1S

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.monster-madness.com